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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

Letter dated 29 July 1993 from the Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Norwegian authorities, I have the honour to present herewith a summary of the recommendations of the Expert Meeting on Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities through Physical Activity and Outdoor Nature Life, held at Beitostølen, Norway, from 24 to 28 March 1993 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter with the attached text circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 110 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed) Martin HUSLID
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of Norway to the United Nations

* A/48/150.

ANNEX

"Focus on the Potential 1993": summary of the report of the Expert Meeting on Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities through Physical Activity and Outdoor Nature Life

The Norwegian Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is pleased to inform the Secretary-General of the United Nations that an Expert Meeting on Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities through Physical Activity and Outdoor Nature Life was held at Beitostølen, Norway, from 24 to 28 March 1993.

The Norwegian Government sees the above-mentioned Expert Meeting as a contribution to the task of continuing the important work started during the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons. It is important that we commit ourselves to turning awareness into action in the decade ahead.

The Expert Meeting, which brought together representatives nominated by their Governments with a particular interest in the subject-matter from 24 countries around the world, served as a forum for exchange of views and experience in the field of adapted sports activities and outdoor nature life as an element in the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

The interventions and discussions during the meeting resulted in a number of recommendations drawing the attention of both Governments and the international community to the aspects on which it is important to take appropriate action when implementing the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons. Sports and recreational activities for persons with disabilities are important elements to be taken into account in the application of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and in the elaboration of the long-term strategy for the implementation of the World Programme of Action.

Among the recommendations adopted, several stressed that disability issues need to be addressed within integrated social development policies with the objective of facilitating full integration of persons with disabilities in society. Every Government should, therefore, give priority attention to the medical, vocational and social rehabilitation of persons with disabilities within their socio-economic policies and encourage the development of inter-professional cooperation.

Sports and recreational activities for persons with disabilities should be seen as an important element in the Governments' efforts in this respect. Sports for all is an important part of creating a society for all and national policy should take into account the value of participation in general sports events on the national, regional and international levels to further the aim spelled out above. The importance of making persons with disabilities aware of their own potential was acknowledged and the importance for the individual concerned of learning to use the body and thus developing self-perception and consciousness, self-esteem and self-confidence was underlined. The value of experiencing nature, also untouched nature, was viewed as an important element of the fundamental rights of every citizen and must also be accorded to persons with disabilities.

Observing the Norwegian Army's important role in the "Ridderrenn", an international ski event which gathers 1,000 persons with and without disabilities from more than 25 countries around the world, led to the adoption of a recommendation encouraging Governments to explore the role of the armed forces and similar institutions in programmes and activities for persons with disabilities.

The recommendations adopted at the Expert Meeting also underline issues of a more general nature: the need for increased research efforts in order to strengthen the empirical basis for the development of programmes and strategies in this field, the importance of integrated education for children, exploration of the possibilities offered by new technology, the responsibilities of Governments and employers concerning employment and vocational retraining as well as the importance of designing society, the environment, houses, streets, communications and all activities and services in such a way that they are accessible to persons with disabilities. The paramount importance of involving the disabled themselves in the planning of measures for persons with disabilities was underlined. According to the Expert Meeting, the implementation and follow-up of the aims listed above should be ensured by a monitoring mechanism to follow the implementation by Governments of international standards and aims.

The recommendations directed at the international community encouraged the members of the United Nations system, in cooperation with interested Member States, to contribute to pilot projects aiming at enhancing the participation of persons with disabilities in sports activities and outdoor nature life. The active participation of persons with disabilities should be recognized as an important contribution to the attainment of the established aim of moving from awareness to action in the coming years. The Expert Meeting also encouraged the Secretary-General of the United Nations to consider the possibility of celebrating a day in the name of Louis Braille.

The recommendations received unanimous support from the participants at the meeting.